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AUTHOR Opuni, Kwami; And Others
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ABSTRACT

The effectiveness of the Student Assignment Center program (SAC), an inschool suspension program implemented in the Houston Independent School District, is evaluated in this report. The program provides instructional and counseling support services for middle-school students who risk suspension or expulsion for conduct code violations. Goals are to improve students' attitudes and behaviors through motivational techniques and to improve their organizational skills and study habits. Methodology involved surveys of SAC staff, principals, and teachers at 19 participating middle schools; student attitude surveys; and analysis of program recidivism rates. Findings indicate that, overall, the program was partially effective in achieving its goals--particularly, in improving the recidivism rate and classroom environments. However, deficiencies identified by respondents formed the basis for several recommendations, one of which is to combine long- and short-term frameworks. Nine tables and six figures are included. The appendix lists SAC resources. (18 references) (LMI)

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Student Assignment Centers: An In-School Suspension Program 1990–91

Opuni, Kwame A., Ph.D.
Tullis, Richard J., Ed.D.
Sanchez, Kathryn S., Ed.D.
Gonzalez, J.

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EA 023 562

THE STUDENT ASSIGNMENT CENTERS

1990-91 Report

ABSTRACT

A Student Assignment Center (SAC) is an in-school suspension program that is designed to provide instructional and counseling support services for middle school students who are at-risk of being suspended or expelled for conduct code violations. The goals of the program are: (a) the improvement of student attitudes and behavior through the use of motivational techniques, and (b) the facilitation of student learning by the development of the organizational skills, goal-setting skills, and study habits of students. Nineteen middle schools had SAC's during the 1990-91 school year. This report evaluates the effectiveness of the program in improving student discipline, and further synthesizes recommendations from program personnel for program improvement. The multiple and concurrent measures of program efficacy included evaluations by the SAC staff, principals, and classroom teachers of the program schools. Other measures were student attitude surveys and recidivism rates of program students at the respective sites. Overall, the measures indicated that the program was partially effective in achieving its goals. For instance, 51.5% of student referrals to the SAC's did not have a second referral during the entire year. The SAC's also provided the opportunity for the non-SAC students to obtain conducive classroom environments where productive instruction could occur. However, there was much indication that the program had many deficiencies that had hampered the realization of the program's optimal efficacy. Many recommendations were accordingly proposed by the teachers and principals for addressing the identified deficiencies.

INTRODUCTION

Teachers at the elementary and secondary levels continue to express much concern and dissatisfaction about the unmitigated prominence of disciplinary problems in the school environment. Student discipline exercises a very strong and pervasive influence on many determinants of school effectiveness. Among these are factors such as teacher morale, teacher job-related stress, teacher retention, student time-on-task, and ultimately, the overall amount of learning that takes place.

A study of 5,000 Chicago teachers about the causes of job-related stress indicated that the teachers regarded the management of disruptive students as second only to being involuntarily transferred (Cichon and Koff, 1980) as the major cause of stress. Fourteen out of fifteen Gallup Polls conducted across the nation between 1969 and 1983 revealed that Americans regarded discipline as the most important problem in the public schools (Jones, 1984). Furthermore, a recent survey of teachers by the Education Department's

Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI) has indicated that incidents of disruptive behavior have become such a problem for teachers that 29% of the teachers polled indicated that *"they have seriously considered leaving teaching"* as a result (Education Week, 1987).

The amount of student learning is also adversely affected if the teacher spends an excessive proportion of instructional time on discipline management problems (Stallings, 1985). In such situations, the disciplined student suffers indirectly through the loss of productive learning time that the teacher devotes to the management of the undisciplined student. The undisciplined student is, however, not immune to the adverse effects of his or her lack of discipline. In the words of Amitai Etzioni:

> *The lack of self-discipline on the part of the student can counteract effective teaching, as learning requires a substantial amount of concentration, control of impulse, self-motivation, and ability to face and overcome stress (Etzioni, 1984).*

In effect, it is the opinion of many educators and non-educators that discipline is the most significant determinant of student success. The SAC program provides a mechanism to address dysfunctional attitudes and behaviors of students in order to facilitate a conducive school environment where productive instruction can occur. The Student Assignment Centers (SAC's) were implemented by the Houston Independent School District (HISD) in nineteen of its thirty-four middle schools during the 1990-91 school year. The centers served students who were at-risk of being suspended or expelled from school for minor or moderately serious conduct violations, as listed in group 1—3 of the district's Code of Student Conduct. Such violations included: improper dressing, running or making excessive noise in the halls, leaving school grounds without permission, tobacco smoking, fighting, gambling, unprovoked disrespect toward school personnel, acts of disobedience, disorderly behavior, use of profane or immoral language or gestures, and class cutting.

The SAC is designed to address those skills and attitudes which, if lacking, may keep students from being productive learners. The activities of the program are designed to enhance student attitudes toward school, through the use of motivational techniques, organizational skills, good study habits, and goal setting. Each SAC is required to have reference materials such as dictionaries and teacher editions of all prescribed textbooks. The regular classroom teachers of students who are referred to the SAC submit assignments to students while they are at the center. These assignments are to be completed by the student, under the supervision and instructional support of the SAC teacher. This framework allows the students to keep abreast of regular classroom instruction.

The budget for the 1990-91 school year was $12,000, excluding staff salaries. Each SAC received $300 for the purchase of reading supplies and an additional $300 for the purchase of general supplies.

This report assesses the effectiveness of the Student Assignment Centers during the 1990-91 school year, and provides recommendations from teachers, administrators and SAC staff for program improvement. Specifically, this inquiry addressed the following research questions:

1. What were the daily enrollment and absentee rates at the SAC's during the 1990-91 school year?
2. Why were students referred to the SAC's?
3. What was the impact of the program on recidivism rates at the respective schools?
4. How many days did students spend in the SAC's during the 1990-91 school year.
5. What was the impact of the program on student attitudes?
6. What were the perceptions of the SAC staff about the weaknesses, strengths and effectiveness of the program?
7. What were the perceptions of the principals about the weaknesses and effectiveness of the program?
8. What were the perceptions of the regular classroom teachers about the weaknesses, strengths and effectiveness of the program?
9. What were the recommendations of the SAC staff, principals, and the regular classroom teachers for program refinement?

METHODOLOGY

Sample

Data on the entire population of students who were referred to the nineteen Student Assignment Centers during the 1990-91 school year were used in this evaluation. Additionally, all of the principals, teachers, and SAC staff of the nineteen SAC middle schools were surveyed. No subsequent samples were derived from any of the preceding populations.

Data Analysis

The analysis of the data follows a descriptive format, and focuses on: (a) the implementation of the program at the various centers, (b) the effectiveness of the program, and (c) recommendations for developing a more effective program for addressing the disciplinary needs of the district's middle schools.

RESULTS

Question 1: What were the daily enrollment and absentee rates in 1990-91 school year.

METHODS

Monthly reports were obtained throughout the school year from the centers. The reports documented student referrals and enrollment, the reason for each referral, the date and length of stay of each referral, and daily absentee rates.

FINDINGS

As Table 1.1 indicates, the mean daily enrollment figures for McReynolds, Holland, Hogg, and Smith Middle Schools ranged between 25 and 34 students. These

figures exceed the teacher-student ratio of 1:25 which pertains to the regular classroom. In view of the fact that the SAC students had committed disciplinary infractions reflective of problematic attitudes, behaviors or needs, it would be generally expected that the student and teacher ratio should be much lower. Indeed, the SAC handbook specifies a ratio of 1:20. Visits to McReynolds and Hogg on days that could not necessarily be regarded as representative of other days, revealed that the class sizes were too large for one teacher to provide adequate one-on-one or small group tutoring. Six of the nineteen SAC's investigated had mean daily enrollments in excess of SAC guidelines.

Table 1.1
Total School Enrollment & Mean
Daily Enrollmen/Absentee Rates (1990-91)

Student Assignment Center	School's 1990-91 Enrollment	Center's Daily Mean Enrollment	Center's Daily Mean Absentee Rate
Clifton	1387	15	1
Edison	1333	10	2
Fleming	785	21**	7
Fondren	1122	11	2
Fonville	726	17	2
Hamilton	1168	12	3
Hogg	1073	29**	8
Holland	1155	32**	11
Jackson	1537	22**	6
Johnston	1521	7	0
Lanier	1358	17	0
Lincoln	523	12	0
McReynolds	944	34**	0
Pershing	1510	7	0
Revere	1611	11	3
Ryan	948	*	*
Smith	332	25**	10
Terrell	296	17	5
Welch	1608	8	2

* *Insufficient data*
** *Exceeds recommended enrollment ratio*

The mean daily absentee rate was highest in Fleming (30%), Holland (38%), and Smith (40%). Since students are supposed to serve all the days for which they are assigned to the centers, the more days they were absent from the SAC's the longer it took them to return to their regular classroom.

Question 2: Why were students referred to the SAC's?

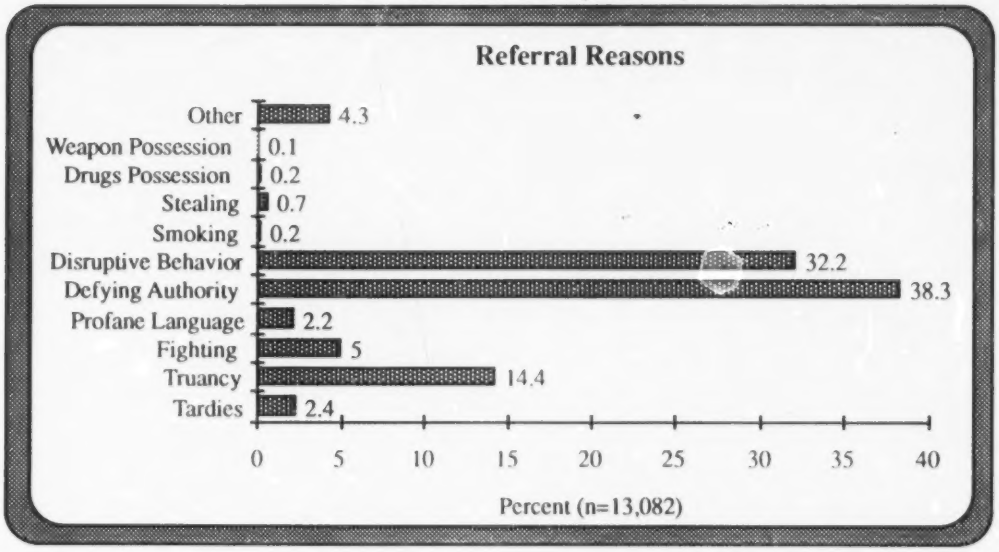
METHODS

Monthly reports were obtained throughout the school year from the centers. The reports documented student referrals, enrollment, and the reasons for each referral.

FINDINGS

Of the 13, 082 (duplicated) referrals to the district's SAC's during the 1990-91 school year, 32.5% were sixth graders, 31.9% were eighth graders, and 35.2% were seventh graders. As Figure 2.1 portrays, disruptive behavior and defiant attitudes toward school teachers and other staff represent 70.5% of the reasons for which the students were referred to the centers. The third highest reason was truancy, which includes skipping of classes and leaving the classroom or campus grounds without permission (14.4%).

Figure 2.1
Percent of Students Referred to SAC's
For Various Reasons (1990-91)



A closer review of the referral reasons of the SAC's revealed that even though most of the centers had a considerable proportion of their referral reasons in the areas of disruptive behavior and defiant attitudes toward school personnel, the proportions varied from center to center (Table 2.1). This observation indicates that the problem or referral areas varied in severity among the centers. For example, while 59% of students at McReynolds were referred for defying the authority of school personnel, the dominant area

of discipline referrals at Clifton (39%), Hogg (39%), and Jackson (39%) was disruptive behavior of the students.

Furthermore, one observes that some of the SAC schools indicated other discipline areas such as truancy (Fleming, 45%; Fonville, 42%), or fighting (Fondren, 32%) as ranking highest among the reasons. All these differences have district and building level planning and management implications.

Table 2.1
Highest Ranking Reasons For Each SAC (1990-91)
as Percents of Total Referral Reasons

Schools	Truancy*	Defying Authority	Disruptive Behavior	Fighting	Referral Total
Clifton	33%	13%	39%	—	460
Edison	12%	31%	32%	—	201
Fleming	45%	28%	8%	—	387
Fondren	21%	—	23%	32%	251
Fonville	42%	11%	34%	—	402
Hamilton	28%	21%	14%	—	332
Hogg	31%	17%	39%	—	656
Holland	32%	20%	27%	—	527
Jackson	30%	14%	39%	—	263
Johnston	22%	—	24%	23%	439
Lanier	16%	26%	29%	—	740
Lincoln	—	37%	27%	23%	423
McReynolds	—	59%	37%	—	6,075
Pershing	—	36%	36%	—	298
Revere	41%	—	36%	—	303
Ryan	38%	27%	22%	—	326
Smith	33%	13%	22%	—	387
Terrell	18%	24%	22%	—	308
Welch	23%	31%	31%	—	156

* *leaving the classroom or school grounds without permission, "cutting class," and other forms of truancy.*

Question 3: What was the impact of the program on recidivism rates at the respective schools?

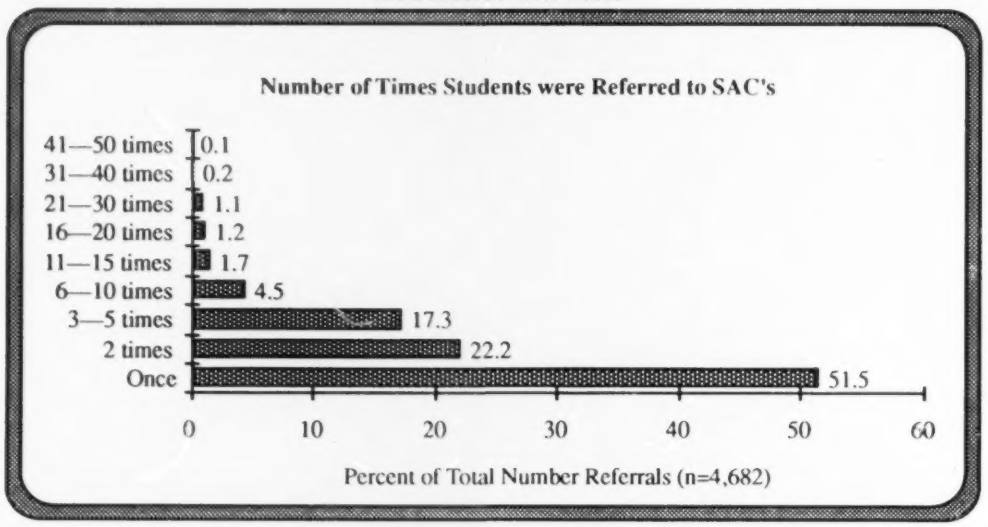
METHODS

Monthly reports were obtained throughout the school year from the centers. The reports documented student referrals and enrollment, the reason for each referral, the date and length of stay of each referral, and daily absentee rates.

FINDINGS

Overall, 51.5% of the students were referred to the SAC's only once during the 1990-91 school year (Figure 3.1). Ideally a 100% success rate would indicate a 100% for the "once" category which means that all students referred to the SAC's corrected their ways after a single referral. According to Andrew Heitzman *"Discipline is effective when it teaches appropriate behavior and prevents a second detention" (Heitzman, 1984).* If the proportion of each center's total number of referrals who were referred only once is used to assess the effectiveness of the SAC's the following would be how the respective centers performed: Pershing, 76%; Fondren,74%; Fonville, 68%; Revere, 67%; Edison, 66%; Jackson, 65%; Holland,60%; Fleming, 59%; Clifton,58%; Johnston,58%; Hamilton, 55%; Ryan, 53%; Lincoln, 51%; Lanier, 51%; Hogg, 50%; Smith, 44%; Terrell, 42%; Welch, 27%; McReynolds 18%.

Figure 3.1
SAC Recidivism Rates



However, there was a substantial proportion (26%) of the students who were referred to the SAC's for three or more times during the school year. A breakdown of this group of repeat referrals is as follows: Edison (11.8%), Fonville (9.5%), Clifton (18%), Hamilton (13.2%), Holland (15.5%), Hogg (26%), Jackson (9.7%), Johnston (16.3%), Welch (15.9%), Lanier (28%), Gregory Lincoln (31.2%), Revere (13.5%), McReynolds

(69.8%), Pershing (6.6%), Ryan (14.2%), Smith (34%), Fondren (9.4%), Terrell (37.9%), and Fleming (15.9%).

A review of the preceding data indicated that McReynolds had (a) the lowest proportion of its students who were referred only once; and (b) the largest number of students who were referred to an SAC for three or more times during the school year. Indeed, 9.8% (n=71) of the referrals of McReynolds SAC were referred 15-20 times, 7.7% (n=55) were referred 21-30 times, while 2.1% (n=17) were referred 31-51 times. However, it should be mentioned that the program at McReynolds was different. At McReynolds, students were referred to the center for two consecutive class periods, during which the students were required to write essays describing their behavior, and suggest ways for improvement.

Question 4: How many days did students spend in the SAC's during the 1990-91 school year?

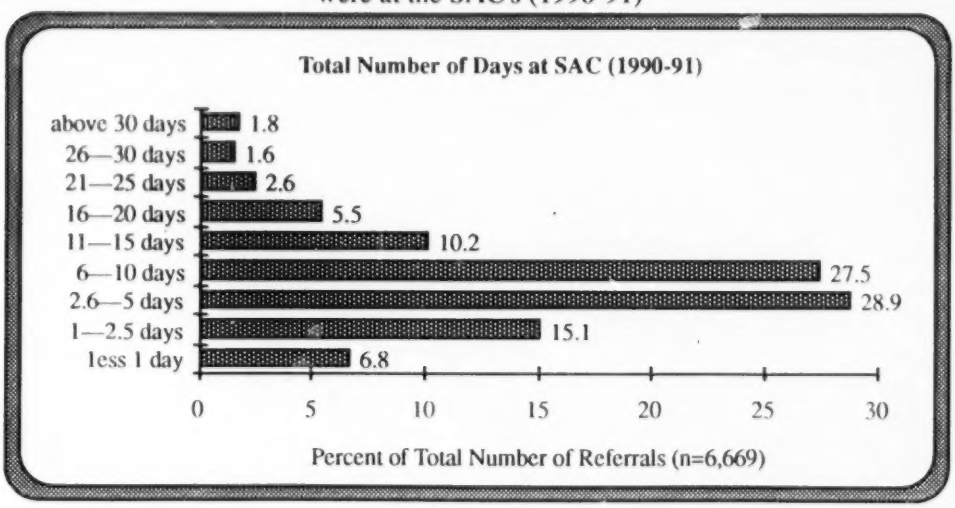
METHODS

Monthly reports were obtained throughout the school year from the centers. The reports documented student referrals, enrollment, and the length of stay of each referral.

FINDINGS

Figure 4.1 indicates that more than one half (56%) of the total number of students who were referred to the SAC's spent between one half of a week and two weeks at the SAC's during the school year. Over 400 students however spent more than one month out of the nine-month school year at the SAC's.

Figure 4.1
Length of Time Students
were at the SAC's (1990-91)



A more revealing breakdown of the proportion of students who spent more than one month at a center is shown on Table 4.1.

Table 4.1
Percent of Each Center's Total Referrals
With more than one Month stay at SAC

SAC School	% of Total Referrals	SAC School	% of Total Referrals
Terrell	29.5%	Revere	6.5%
Welch	26.8%	Clifton	4.4%
Smith	23.7%	Hogg	4.3%
Fleming	12.3%	Fonville	3.3%
Ryan	12.2%	Fondren	1.7%
Holland	8.1%	Johnston	1.6%
Hamilton	7.4%	Lanier	0.3%
Edison	7.3%	Pershing	0%
Lincoln	6.7%	—	—

Question 5: What was the impact of the program on student attitudes?

METHODS

Student Survey Form A & Student Survey Form B were used to assess the perceptions of the students about the program when they entered the centers (Form A) and when they exited from the centers (Form B). The goal of this analysis was to investigate changes in student attitudes about school that resulted from exposure to the SAC program.

FINDINGS

A pre-post survey of SAC students during the months of February, March and April of 1991 revealed some attitudinal perspectives of the students. The students were asked to indicate if: (a) they were embarrassed by the fact their classmates knew that they were spending or had spent some time at the SAC's; and (b) they believed they had been helped by the SAC program. Overall, at the time when students entered the SAC's a larger proportion indicated that they were not embarrassed to be there (Figure 5.1). The exit percentage figures for eight SAC's declined or improved slightly at some centers (Edison, 19%; Fonville, 13%; Hamilton, 5%; Hogg, 12%; Welch, 10%; Revere, 2%; Pershing,8%; Fondren, 17%), while the figures for ten centers increased (Clifton, 9%; Jackson, 7%; Johnson,4%; Lanier, 6%; Lincoln, 1%; McReynolds,23%; Ryan, 3%, Smith, 2%, Terrell, 1%; Fleming, 1%).

In comparison to the proportion of students who were not embarrassed to be at the SAC's (Figure 5.2) there were much smaller proportions of the students at the respective SAC's who indicated that they were embarrassed to be at the SAC's. Those figures also

experienced increases or improvements at seven centers (Fonville, 4%; Hamilton, 1%; Hogg, 8%; Welch, 19%; Lincoln,5%; Pershing, 11%; Fondren, 9%; and Ryan, 2%) and Ryan, 2%) and decreases at eleven centers (Edison, 8%; Clifton, 1%; Jackson, 5%; Johnston, 6%; Lanier, 2%; Revere, 10%; McReynolds, 6%; Smith, 7%; and Fleming, 3%).

Figure 5.1
Percent of Referrals Not Embarrassed to be at SAC

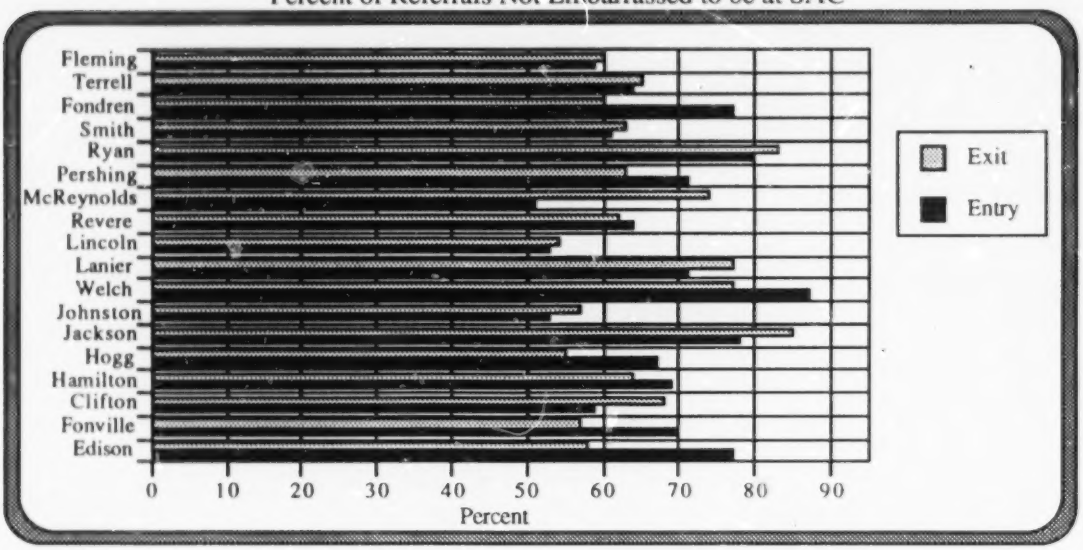
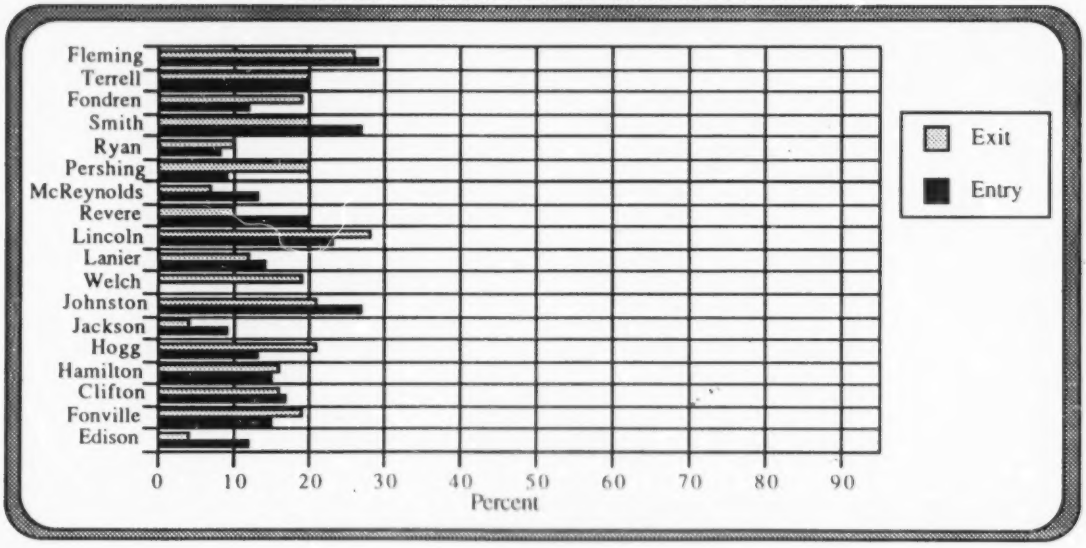
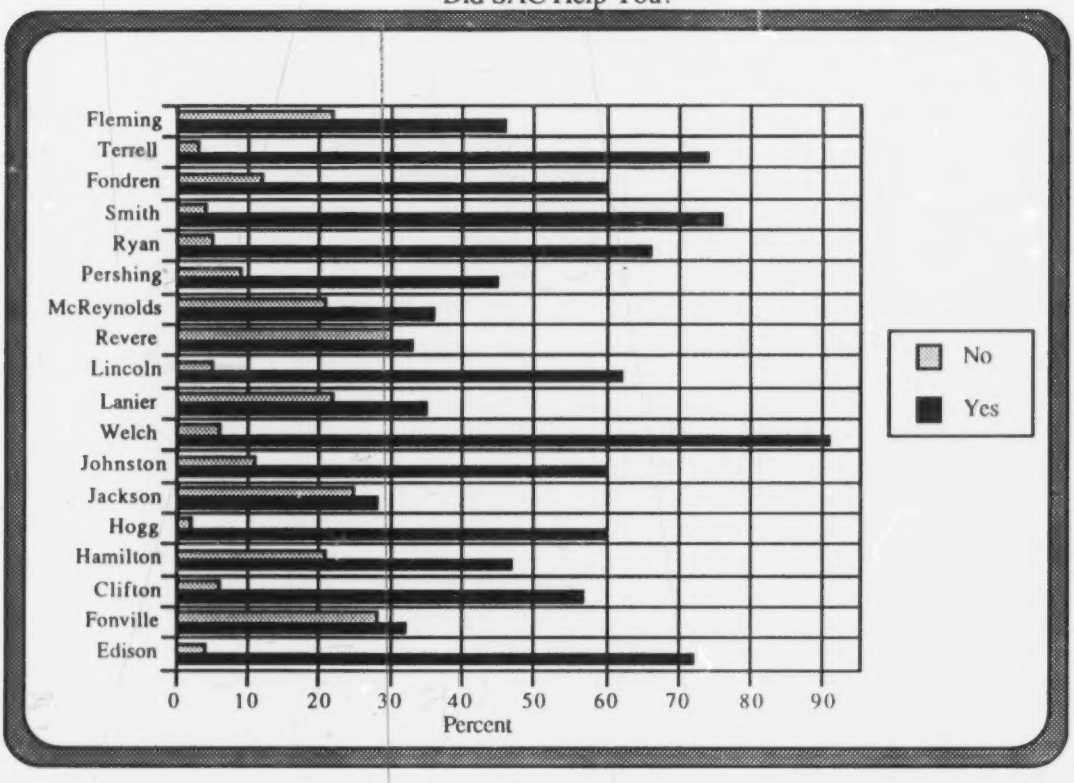


Figure 5.2
Percent of Referrals Embarrassed to be at SAC



As Figure 5.3 portrays, a considerable proportion of students who had completed their stay at the centers indicated that the program had helped them. The centers with the highest percentage figures were Welch, 91%; Smith, 76%; Terrell, 74%; Edison, 72%; Ryan, 66%; Lincoln, 62%; Hogg, 60%; Johnston, 60%; Fondren, 60%; and Clifton, 57%.

Figure 5.3
Did SAC Help You?



There were, however, a proportion of the students who indicated that the SAC's had not helped them. The proportion of those students ranged between: (a) 21% and 30% for Fonville, Hamilton, Jackson, Lanier, Revere, McReynolds, and Fleming; (b) 10% and 20% for Johnston, and Fondren; and (c) 3% and 9% for Edison, Clifton,Hogg, Welch, Lincoln, Pershing, Ryan, Smith, and Terrell.

Question 6: What were the perceptions of the SAC staff about the effectiveness of the program?

METHODS

The views of SAC teachers were obtained with the SAC Staff Survey. The survey focused on issues dealing with program resources, implementation problems, and perceived effectiveness of the program. The survey return rate was 95%, which represented 18 centers.

FINDINGS

Twenty eight percent of the SAC staff indicated that they had 5 years of teaching experience, while 21% indicated that they had between 6-15 years of teaching and/or counseling experience. However, 50% of the teachers indicated they had more than 16 years of teaching and/or counseling experience.

Program Weaknesses

When the SAC teachers were asked to indicate the extent to which the following seven factors (Table 6.1) had limited the effectiveness of the SAC in improving the delinquent attitudes and behaviors of their students, 50% of the staff identified low parental support as the major factor. However, a majority of the teachers expressed that (a) space configuration was adequate for effective tutoring and counseling; (b) they had adequate support from the students classroom teachers; (c) they were adequately knowledgeable of behavior modification techniques; and (d) they did not regard the students as incorrigible.

Table 4
SAC Staff Assessment of Factors Limiting Effectiveness of Centers

Factor/Problem	% of Staff Rating factor as Major Problem	% of Staff rating factor as Minor Problem
Incorrigibility of students	22%	50%
Low Parental Support	50%	11%
Inadequate Counseling Support	44%	44%
High Sudent-teacher ratio	39%	39%
Lack of adequate teacher support	28%	50%
Inadequate training of SAC staff in behavior modification techniques	22%	67%
Lack of conducive room for effective tutoring & counseling	33%	50%

The following factors were mentioned by the SAC teachers as deficiency areas.

Supplies and Resources: The areas that were most often mentioned included the lack of adequate supplies and resources such as: reading materials (Revere); TAAS booklets (Lanier); telephone, audio visuals that focus on attitude and behavior modification, self-esteem, coping with peer pressure and dysfunctional homes, cubicles (Johnston, Terrell, Fleming, Lincoln, Fonville); all adopted textbooks (Jackson, Fondren, Gregory Lincoln); a larger classroom (Jackson), motivational books (Fondren); and an air-conditioned classroom (Holland). With regard to the need for telephones, one teacher commented as follows: *"A telephone in the center would allow the teacher to contact parents immediately when an offense occurs, or when the student is truant. Many times the parents are unaware their children are in the center."*

A resource study of the SAC's indicated that at least 33% of the SAC's do not have the relevant supplies and copies of teacher editions of school textbooks (Appendix A). Additionally, except for Johnston Middle SAC that had a teacher who was a certified counselor, none of the SAC's has a teacher with counseling preparation. The SAC handbook indicates the provision of telephones at the centers. However, more than 60% of the centers had no telephones.

Staffing of SAC's: Virtually all of the SAC teachers mentioned the lack of a full time counselor at each of the centers as a major weakness of the program. In the words of a SAC teacher who had been a counselor and psychologist prior to her assignment to the SAC: *"it is very evident that a full-time counselor and a teacher are needed in SAC. There is a steady increase of assignees who are on probation, both male and female, who are extremely defiant and lack total respect for authority, and are very angry with adults"*. Another teacher further expressed her predicament simply with these words: *Since we don't have a counseling licence, we can't be expected to be that successful"*. Approximately 40% of the teachers mentioned that high student-teacher ratio was undermining the effectiveness of the centers.

Program Strengths

In the opinion of one SAC teacher *" In the absence of corporal punishment all that remains is the SAC."* Another SAC teacher expressed the following: *"The SAC provides a safety valve for teachers who sometimes need some time out from some students so that quality teaching can be provided for the rest of their classes. In many instances, it actually performs the mission that it was designed for...The SAC's don't solve all the problems for the teachers, administrators, and students, but they are a great help to everyone."*

Program Effectiveness

The SAC teachers indicated that the quality of instruction they have been providing at the centers was about 83% of what is usually provided in the regular classrooms of the students. They also rated their overall effectiveness in improving the delinquent attitudes and behaviors of their students as 78%.

Question 7: What were the perceptions of the principals about the weaknesses and effectiveness of the program?.

METHODS

The Principal Survey was used to investigate the : (a) major weaknesses of the program; and (b) recommendations for resolving the weaknesses. Since the building principals make the referrals of students to the SAC's and determine the staffing and functioning of the respective SAC's, they were surveyed to help determine their perceptions of the following: (a) the functions or purposes of the SAC's on their campuses; (b) a rating of the amount of learning that takes place at the centers, in relation to that which occurs in the regular classrooms; (c) the overall effectiveness of the center; and (d) major and minor problems facing the center. Thirteen (68%) principals responded to the survey.

FINDINGS

In assessing the amount of learning that occurs at the centers, the principals were asked to rate the quality of learning at the SAC's as a percentage of the amount of learning that occurs in the regular classroom. In effect, a scale of 0% to 100% was to be used, with 100% being equivalent to the amount of learning that occurs in the regular classroom. The principals gave an overall rating of 69%. The overall effectiveness of the centers in improving the delinquent attitudes and behaviors of the students was also rated as 69%.

Principals' Perceptions of the Functions of SAC's

As Table 7.1 shows, *punishing the students by isolation* and *counseling* rank highest among the purposes for which principals refer students to the SAC. In effect, instructional quality, comparable to what prevails in the regular classroom, is not the primary goal. The primary goal is simply to improve the delinquent attitudes or behaviors of the students through psychological pressure of isolation and counseling. If this perception is accurate, then one would expect that counselors should be an essential component of the SAC staff.

Table 7.1
Perceptions of Principals
About SAC Functions

Function	% of Principals selecting function
Punish by isolation from friends	75%
A counseling & a punitive role	69%
Help remediate academic deficiencies	23%
Serve as place for "time Out"or to "Cool off"	8%
In lieu of suspension	8%
Teach Self-Discipline	8%
Write essay about behavior & indicate ways to improve behavior	8%

Principals' Perceptions of Problems Facing SAC's

Most of the principals indicated that high teacher-student ratio, inadequate training of SAC staff in behavior modification techniques, and inadequate counseling were the major factors that had limited the effectiveness of their SAC's (Table 7.2).

Table 7.2
Principal Assessment of Factors Limiting Effectiveness of Centers

Factor	% Rating Factor as Major Problem	% Rating factor as Minor Problem
Incorrigibility of students	31%	46%
Low Parental Support	38%	31%
Inadequate counseling	54%	31%
High student-teacher ratio	62%	23%
Lack of adequate teacher support	38%	15%
Inadequate training for SAC staff in behavior modification techniques	62%	31%
Lack of conducive room for effective tutoring & Counseling	46%	31%

Question 8: What were the perceptions of the regular classroom teachers about the weaknesses, strengths and effectiveness of the program?.

METHODS

A questionnaire instrument (Classroom Teacher Survey) was used to assess the perceptions of classroom teachers about the weaknesses and overall efficacy of the program. The instrument contained items that asked teachers if they had seen any changes in the behavior, conduct, or attitudes of students who had been previously referred to the SAC's during the year. Three hundred and thirty nine teachers (31%) responded to the survey.

FINDINGS

The teachers of all the SAC schools were surveyed to find out their perceptions of the purposes and effectiveness of the SAC's in resolving the disciplinary problems of students they had referred to the centers through their respective building principals. Teachers always had the opportunity to observe students in their classrooms who had been referred to the SAC's and could determine if attitudes and behaviors had been positively influenced by the program.

Teacher Perceptions of the Functions of SAC's

As Table 8.1 shows, *punishing the students by isolation from friends* ranked highest among the purposes for which teachers referred students to the SAC (i.e.74% of the teachers). The primary goal was thus to improve the delinquent attitudes or behaviors of the students through psychological pressure of isolation. This factor also ranked highest on the principal survey (75%). It is also important to note that about one half of the teachers (49%) regarded the SAC as a *dumping ground for students with discipline problems*.

Table 8.1
Perceptions of Teachers
About SAC Functions

Function	% of Teachers selecting function
Punish by isolation from friends	74%
A counseling & a punitive role	41%
Help remediate academic deficiencies	18%
Serve as a dumping ground for students with discipline problems	49%

Teacher Perceptions of Instructional Quality & Effectiveness of SAC's

In assessing the extent to which the amount of learning that occurred at the centers compared to the amount of learning that occurred in the regular classroom on a scale of 0%—100%, the teachers gave an overall rating of 45%. This figure indicated that regular classroom teachers perceived the amount of learning that occurred at the SAC's as one half of what occurred in their classrooms. This low rating of learning, coupled with the fact that approximately half the responding teachers felt that the SAC's were a "dumping ground for students with discipline problems" lends credence to the principal survey finding that students were not sent to the SAC's primarily for learning, but rather isolation and counseling. Additionally, the overall effectiveness of the centers in improving the delinquent attitudes and behaviors of the students was rated as 46% for all of the nineteen SAC's. The teacher ratings of the respective SAC's are shown on Table 8.2.

Table 8.2
Classroom Teacher Assessment
of SAC Instructional Quality & Effectiveness

SAC School	Survey Return Rate	Rating of SAC Effectiveness (Scale: 0%—100%)	Rating of SAC Instructional Quality as % of what occurs in Regular Classroom
Clifton	33%	37%	33%
Edison	23%	49%	57%
Fleming	33%	54%	56%
Fondren	32%	37%	41%
Fonville	26%	22%	26%
Hamilton	34%	52%	38%
Hogg	32%	57%	54%
Holland	21%	44%	35%
Jackson	27%	35%	41%
Johnston	36%	54%	60%
Lanier	24%	57%	25%
Lincoln	34%	48%	47%
McReynolds	12%	69%	64%
Pershing	21%	43%	45%
Revere	25%	31%	38%
Ryan	23%	40%	35%
Smith	36%	54%	60%
Terrell	32%	31%	38%
Welch	22%	58%	61%

Even though, these data are based on qualitative assessments, they reflect the current collective perceptions of the teachers who responded to the survey. These teachers have had students who had been referred to these centers and had known the extent to which their students had been kept abreast of classroom instruction by the SAC's, or been helped by the SAC staff to improve student attitudes and behavior. While the survey return rates left much to be desired, it must be emphasized that they possibly came from teachers who were concerned about their morale, job-related stress levels, and the academic betterment of both the regular and the SAC students.

The low assessment rates for the quality of instruction at the SAC's (ranging between 25% and 64%) indicated that students were perceived by their teachers to be losing grounds academically when they spent time at the SAC. In effect, the longer they stayed at the SAC the farther they fell behind in their studies. Additionally, the low rates for SAC effectiveness in improving the delinquent attitudes and behaviors of SAC students indicated that many did not improve or if they improved it might be marginal or partial. This meant that many students returned to the regular classroom with their problematic attitudes and behaviors still intact or only marginally changed.

Teacher Perceptions of Problems facing SAC's

Most of the teachers indicated that *incorrigibility of students (65%)* and *Low Parental Support (66%)* were the major factors that had limited the effectiveness of the SAC's (Table 8.3).

Table 8.3
Principal Assessment of Factors Limiting
Effectiveness of Centers

Factor	% Rating Factor as Major Problem	% Rating factor as Minor Problem
Incorrigibility of students	65%	16%
Low Parental Support	66%	17%
High student-teacher ratio	46%	31%
Lack of adequate teacher support	18%	55%
Inadequate training for SAC staff in behavior modification techniques	36%	45%
Lack of conducive room for effective tutoring & Counseling	37%	43%

Lack of Counselors

More than 95% of the teachers from the nineteen SAC schools identified *lack of counselors* as the most vital but missing component of the program. The following is a representative sample of the many comments that were made by the teachers:

These students have emotional problems that they carry from home. They need counseling from professionals. They come from drug and alcohol addicted homes, and they are "using" and "drinking" by 7th grade. The lack of knowledge about addiction and dysfunctional families is incredible. No one is helping these students. (Clifton Teacher)

To really improve the delinquent attitudes and behavior [of students], long term counseling and follow-up are needed. The SAC does not provide this. (Johnston Teacher)

I feel isolation from peers is effective for many students at this age; but without counseling, the effect is usually temporary. (Revere Teacher)

The students being sent to SAC are most often the same ones over and over. These students probably do not want to be in school to begin with; so they see school as a place to do as they choose. These students definitely need more one-on-one tutoring and counseling. (Lanier teacher)

As far as I know, there is no counseling happening...mini-jail is all I see it to be. (Hamilton Teacher)

The students should dread going to the SAC—it should be a punishment, but it is not. The students leap at the chance to attend SAC and have a real "good time. (Revere Teacher)

Building-level SAC Policies

Teachers at some of the schools expressed much dissatisfaction and frustration about the practices and policies in their schools. The following were a few of some of their comments:

If SAC wasn't a fun time for the students, it would be more effective...None of the homework I sent out to SAC was completed. They are only there to serve time. (Fonville Teacher)

They have a good time in there. Our students look forward to being put into SAC. They get out an hour early as well as watch movies, which the kids find appealing. They are released from SAC without the assignments from the classroom completed. Students are asking to be put into SAC because they know they won't have to do any work...students do not work while they are in SAC. They play...It's a joke. It should be run like a military school. (Hamilton Teacher)

We do not even have a regular SAC teacher. There are 3 or 4 different teachers that cover SAC so there is no one set of rules...Very seldom is assigned work completed...Teachers are frustrated because HISD seems not to care about what is going on in the schools...This year for the first time I feel that we are working in an unsafe environment. The district took away corporal punishment but gave us no alternative. The students tell you that you can't do anything to them. Being sent to the office is a meaningless gesture. (Fonville Teacher)

As indicated in the previous comments, many teachers felt that SAC provided a kind of "babysitting service", a place to "dump" disruptive students, a place where students went to "hang out" with friends and refused to do assignments, or sometimes went to sleep. In the opinion of these teachers SAC should be run in such a way that the student should not like to go there. It should be mentioned however that it is not all the centers that were described to have the preceding environments nor was there a unanimous support for the " military style" policy that some teachers want more of. The following statements by one teacher reflects the diversity of philosophical orientation:

SAC would be more effective if the atmosphere reflected a caring but firm attitude. It is currently run from a punitive perspective by humiliating students. Students must suffer consequences for their behavior, but they also need to be "heard", encouraged, and taught how to make better decisions. I would suggest a positive reinforcement system such as a token economy . Often it is difficult to find a punishment "bad enough" for these students. If we want their respect, we must first show respect to them! (Clifton Teacher)

Lack of Parental Involvement

In the opinion of many teachers, the lack of parental involvement in the SAC program activities is what is undermining the effectiveness of the program. One teacher commented that:

The problem is lack of concern of the parents. The SAC program cannot hope to change the attitudes of students who have never enjoyed school—who are from broken, angry homes—and whose parents are too busy, or too unconcerned, or too

caught up in their own problems, to have any time or energy left over for their children. (Lanier teacher)

According to one teacher: *"Children reflect their parents attitude toward learning. If we are going to change the student's classroom behavior, parents must be involved in the counseling of their child."*

Teacher Perceptions of Program Strengths

Almost all of the teachers emphasized the important role being played by the SAC. Many of the teachers indicated that even if the SAC was a "dumping ground"or a "babysitting facility" for problem students, and failed to improve students attitudes and behavior, it at least took the disruptive students away from the classroom. Consequently, it became possible for other students to have a conducive learning environment where meaningful learning could occur. In the words of one teacher: *"We are dealing with some difficult children from strained home situations. Some of these students disturb the climate of the classroom and it helps to have these students removed" (*Clifton Teacher). Another teacher also expressed that *"the removal of disruptive student from the regular classroom setting has a tremendous effect on the environment in the regular classroom. The continually disruptive student should be removed from the traditional class setting, and SAC is the only alternative available (Hamilton Teacher).* In the opinion of one Fondren teacher *"SAC has provided an extremely valuable service to the classroom teacher...SAC provides us with a disciplinary tool that works. Sending these students home gives them a holiday; keeping them in class punishes the teacher."* A teacher at Gregory Lincoln, whose observations represented the views of over 95% of the teachers, summed up his/her opinion as follows: *" It [SAC] is effective for some students; however, certain students in our middle school never want to achieve nor attend class, and the SAC is not a deterrent for them. These students need to be placed somewhere else. The repeat offenders consume excessive amounts of staff time in and out of SAC".*

Besides, many believed that SAC's helped the regular students to stay on course; and that it was the "incorrigibles" of the SAC's who were believed to be abusing the program and not benefitting from it. One teacher who seemed unhappy about the situation of the incorrigible students, expressed that the SAC provided peace and learning opportunities for the referring teachers and their good students but provided *"nothing for the [undisciplined] student"*. Others described the program as "a holding tank" or a segregation framework that helps the teacher to "save" other students.

However, there were many teachers who strongly believed that in spite of the many deficiencies the SAC's have been experiencing, such as high student-teacher ratios, lack of telephones, lack parental support, and the fact that most of the students required the services of licensed psychologists, counselors, psychiatrists, or social workers, many students have been immensely helped. In the opinion of many teachers, if the program was not 100% effective, one should not place all the blame on the SAC teachers who did their best.

Question 9: What were the recommendations of the SAC staff, principals, and the regular classroom teachers for program refinement?

METHODS

All of the SAC staff, principals, and classroom teachers of the nineteen SAC middle schools were surveyed in April and May of 1991. The surveys asked for recommendations for refining the program. The return rates of the surveys were as follows: SAC staff, 95%; principals, 68%; and classroom teachers, 31%.

FINDINGS

Recommendations of SAC Staff

Many recommendations were made by the SAC staff for resolving the weaknesses mentioned. They included the hiring of full-time counselors for all the SAC's, lowering of student-teacher ratios, creation of separate carrels/study booths, provision of separate rooms for isolating hostile students or individual counseling, provision of telephone facilities, visits from social workers, attendance officers, and the hiring of teacher aides. The SAC staff further recommended: (a) that parents be held accountable for the disciplinary problems of the program students, (b) that more staff training in behavior modification and counseling be provided to supplement periodic workshops for the sharing of ideas about "what works," and (c) that an incentive program be implemented for rewarding students who do not return to the SAC's. One teacher recommended that the regular classroom teachers and the building principals be asked to refrain from using the SAC's as a "dumping ground" for students since the overcrowded conditions at the centers limit the effectiveness of the SAC teachers.

In the opinion of one SAC teacher who believed that current efforts are not effective: *"After 2:30 p.m., they [the students] should be assigned to work with the janitors to do chores on campus. The embarrassment and humiliation from their peers might correct their behavior. Many students are not embarrassed for being assigned to the SAC"*. Several SAC teachers who believe in more stringent discipline strategies suggested that seemingly incorrigible students who are frequently referred to the SAC's should be placed in a long term alternative school or disciplinary program until they improve their attitude and behavior.

Recommendations of Principals

Seventy percent of the principals strongly recommended that an additional full-time staff person should be hired for SAC's to address the counseling needs of the students. While a majority of those who expressed this need asked for a counselor, two principals asked for full-time social workers. The principals expressed the notion that the SAC's serve as an effective alternative for some students. In the opinion of two principals, it is only through one-on-one counseling and parental participation in the program that some of the students can be "saved."

With the steady increase in referrals to the SAC's, the principals suggested that more teachers should be hired to work with counselors and social workers to help involve

parents, while giving the students as much counseling help as possible. Some principals further mentioned that the district should provide an alternative disciplinary program that will provide long term help for students with more severe attitude and behavior problems. In their opinion, such an alternative will benefit not only the student but also will help stop the overcrowding, and the creation of waiting lists in some SAC schools. In the words of one principal: *"Putting students on a waiting list is ineffective. This program needs to be available for immediate removal of students from the regular classroom setting".*

Recommendations of Classroom Teachers

Many recommendations were made for addressing the preceding weaknesses of the SAC's. The following were the most mentioned, usually by more than 90% of the teachers. Teachers are apparently experiencing tremendous frustration engendered by the disciplinary problems in their schools, as could be inferred from the emotional intensity of their appeal for help. The following statement by one of the teachers lends credence to how many feel about the problem: *"I want the School Board to address discipline as a TOP policy priority! Until then, we (you and I, my friend) are inching along"* (Fonville Teacher).

Establishment of an Alternative School/Discipline Academy

The district should establish alternative schools, probably one for each district, where the best of human and material resources can be provided for students who exceed three referrals to the SAC or spend more than a specified number of days in the SAC during the school year.

- Staff should include: psychologists, counselors, social workers, and teachers who are strict disciplinarians.
- The curriculum should parallel or correspond to the regular sixth to eighth grade levels.
- Mandate parental conferences and support contracts before the students enters the Academy, during the referral period, and before the student leaves the Academy.

Increase Parental Involvement in SAC's

- Involve parents in the SAC's
- Mandate parent conferences and contracts for certain offenses or when the student exceeds a specified number of referrals to the SAC. Mandate parental conferences for students before they return to the regular classroom.

More Counselors and Psychologists

- Hire a counselor for each of the SAC's who will spend 100% of his/her time with the SAC students. The counselors should not be "paper pushers" for the building level principal.

Hire More Teachers

- The r vision of more SAC teachers will help lower the student-teacher ratio. Many teachers suggested no more than 15 students per teacher.

Hire Social Workers

- The addition of social workers to the SAC staff will immensely strengthen the effectiveness of the centers to enable the staff to get to the "home" roots of what may have made the students incorrigible.

SAC Management Philosophy & Exit Policy

- Teachers should be strict disciplinarians, and should enforce all district SAC policies.
- All assignments submitted by classroom teachers should be completed and returned on a timely basis while the students are at the center, and not when they return to the regular class. There should be no exiting of students until all assignments are completed.
- Permit the SAC teachers to provide generic assignments that can be graded at the SAC.
- SAC teachers should be knowledgeable in all academic content areas so that the classroom teacher does not have to visit the center to explain assignments or topics taught in class. Each SAC should be staffed by a permanent teacher.

Complete Isolation Facilities

- All SAC's should be housed outside of the main school building or away from the regular student population.
- Provide study carrels or booths with dividing walls for each student. Separate each from the other to prevent them from talking to each other.
- Exclude SAC students from extracurricular activities such as school dances and field trips.
- SAC students should not be allowed to interact with regular students. They should bring their own lunch or go to the cafeteria at times different from when other students go there.
- SAC students should start school either an hour early and leave an hour early or start classes at 9 a.m. and leave at 4 p.m. so that they do not get the opportunity to walk their girl friends and boyfriends to class, or socialize with the non-SAC students.

Off-Campus Assignments

- Some teachers suggested that the isolation of SAC students may be enhanced by allowing the SAC of one school to exchange its students for those of another school.

Expulsion of Repeat Referrals

- In the opinion of one teacher, *"Educating everyone is a great idealist goal, but if a student refuses to be taught and stops others from learning, school is not where they should be "(Revere Teacher).* This suggestion was also proposed by two other teachers.

Other Recommendations: The following were suggested by 1-10 teachers

Incentive Program For Repeaters

- Provide an incentive program that can provide awards to students who make excellent improvements.

Uniforms/Dress code

- One teacher suggested that SAC students should be required to wear uniforms in order to make them hate to come to the centers.
- Another teacher suggested that SAC students should be mandated to abide by the district's dress code for students; and that they should not be given dress privileges that deviate from the district-wide dress code.

Teacher Prejudices/Personality Conflicts

- Three teachers indicated that there are situations where because of personality conflicts, teacher prejudices, or lack of disciplinary management skills, some teachers abuse

some students by sending them regularly to the SAC's. The teachers therefore recommend, that counselors, social workers or psychologist work with students in order to prevent such abuse.

Bring Back the Paddle

- A few teachers recommended that the school district brings back corporal punishment.

Provide More Space /Room

- Teachers from several schools suggested a need for adequate room for the SAC eligible students. According to one Fondren teacher *" Many incorrigible students are let off scot-free when they have created major problems because of lack of room [in the SAC]. Therefore, these students are left in classes to remain disruptive".*

CONCLUSION

The findings of this evaluation indicate several positive achievements by the SAC's. Principals and classroom teachers have indicated that the program has been very vital in helping them to provide a healthy environment and productive instruction for the regular and disciplined students. The recidivism rates also indicate that 51.5% of all the referrals to the SAC during the 1990-91 school year never had a second referral. Additionally, a large majority of the SAC students indicated that the SAC's had helped them. However, there are indications that the program had deficiencies that hampered the realization of its optimal effectiveness. Several teachers seemed to be frustrated by the way the program was implemented. A general observation by the teachers that several of the SAC students were repeat referrals was substantiated by the recidivism data (Figure 3.1).

A review of reasons for referrals indicated that *disruptive behavior* and *defiance of authority* accounted for 70% of the reasons for referral. This finding implies that counseling should have been an integral part of the program if the district wanted to effectively change the attitudes and behaviors of the repeaters. Furthermore, the principals expressed the view that the primary purpose of the SAC's was to help improve the delinquent attitudes and behavior of students through psychological pressure of isolation and counseling. The principals also ranked *inadequate counseling support* third after *high student-teacher ratio* and *inadequate training for SAC staff in behavior modification techniques* as the leading factors that hampered the effectiveness of the program. In spite of this need, only one of the SAC's had a teacher who had counseling certification and background. It was therefore not surprising that 70% of the principals, and more than 95% of the SAC and regular classroom teachers, recommended that full-time counselors should be hired for the SAC's.

Most of the teachers and administrators recommended that an alternative school should be established for students with three or more referrals or those who exceeded one month stay in the SAC during the school year. The perception of the classroom teachers that the quality of instruction in the SAC's was inferior to that which was provided in the

regular classroom, implicitly indicated that if nothing was done to address the attitude and behaviors of the seemingly incorrigible students, the students would steadily lag behind in their studies.

Andrew Heitzman's discussion of the guidelines for maximizing the effects of punishment has indicated that school discipline program planners should be "*certain that the averse consequence being administered [punishment] is really punishment for the pupil*" (Heitzman, 1984). Therefore, if teachers perceived that repeat referrals liked to go to the SAC's and no longer found their referral to the SAC's as a punishment, then it is essential that alternative strategies are adopted to effectively address the situation. Several of the recommendations by teachers and principals have been experimented elsewhere in other states. For instance, Rolland R. Jones, Jr. implemented a program with the same goals as those of the SAC's at Deer Valley Junior High School in Phoenix Arizona. The program was very effective. He described his model of social isolation with these words:

> *Each student sits in a chair flanked on both sides by portable partitions and facing the wall, on which appear the Study Center rules. The only breaks during the day are for two bathroom trips and one exercise period consisting of a lap around the outdoor field. No breaks are allowed when the rest of the students are changing classes or out for recess. Lunch is brought to the Study Center and eaten there. No talking is allowed except when the student is called upon by the monitoring teacher. Instead of time off from school, suspended students experience a long day, with minutes seeming more like hours...The key to an effective Study Center is the teacher...I have found it extremely important to to have a strong disciplinarian, who is well organized and knows how to handle troubled students. (Jones, 1985)*

Many of the recommendations proposed by the teachers, principals and SAC staff are similar to the Rolland Jones model. The model did not have a counselor, but it had a telephone that made it possible for the teacher to regularly communicate with the parents of the students. However, it should be mentioned that all the preceding suggestions and most of what have been recommended by teachers and principals are only short term measures for dealing with the discipline situation in HISD schools. According to Vern Jones,

> *since schoolwide discipline programs are often developed in response to a perceived or real crisis, there is a tendency to focus on punitive measures that provide immediate , albeit short term effects, while ignoring preventive measures that may respond to the cause of the problem...with the exception of instructional factors, interventions aimed at improving school climate are the most important ingredients in creating positive student behavior...Students who feel safe, accepted, cared for, and involved at school seldom exhibit consistently disruptive behavior (Jones, 1982).*

In as much as Jones places most of the burden on teachers and principals, he feels strongly that the program should include a systematic framework for involving parents in working to change their child's behavior (Jones, 1982). According to Lasley and Wayson:

> *Teachers and administrators must develop an understanding of the factors that contribute to disciplinary problems. Treating symptoms without dealing with the causes is analogous to giving a chronically sick person aspirin without attempting to identify the causes of the illness...Excessive student fighting, for example, may be*

caused by overcrowded school conditions...the principal plays a prominent role with regards to discipline, and no person has as great an impact on the school atmosphere (Lasley and Wayson, 1982).

In conclusion the training of teachers in effective disciplinary management strategies that specifically address the particular circumstances of each school's disciplinary problems, coupled with building level self diagnosis and improvement of the administrative and instructional climates should be included in a long term planning framework. However, the Alternative Disciplinary Academy for the excessive repeaters should be explored as a short term framework to relieve the SAC's, and allow them to effectively focus on fewer students especially those who may not have yet crossed the point of incorrigibility. A combination of such short and long-term frameworks will not only help the student with disciplinary problems or the disciplined student to focus on more productive learning, but will also lessen job-related stress, and enhance morale and effectiveness of the classroom teacher.

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Appendix A

Resources at SAC's

Schools	Telephone	Certified Teacher	Certified Counselor	File Cabinets	Supplies & Textbooks	Reading Materials
Clifton	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Edison	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
Fleming	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	No
Fondren	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Fonville	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Hogg	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Holland	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Jackson	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Johnston	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Lanier	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Lincoln	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
McReynolds	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Pershing	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Revere	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Ryan	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Smith	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Terrell	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Welch	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes

** Survey was not returned by the staff at Hamilton SAC staff.*

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